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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on how teachers and principals in Maine schools perceive current and desired involvement of parents, community members, and students in school decision making. A survey assessed decision making in four basic areas: (1) mission, goals, and objectives; (2) curriculum, from specific learning outcomes to development of curriculum documents; (3) communication as part of procedures to involve staff, students, and community adequately in school issues; and (4) students, including methods of assessing student progress and the program of study requirements. Completed surveys were received from 152 teachers and 223 principals in primarily rural Maine schools. Responses are categorized by teacher or principal, male or female, and grade (K through 5 or 8, 6-8, and 9-12). Results indicate that: (1) teachers and principals perceived little current involvement and desired greater involvement in all decision-making areas; (2) principals would involve students, parents, and community members in decisions related to curriculum content--however, less than 50 percent of teachers would agree; (3) neither principals nor teachers really desired involvement of students, parents, and community members in decisions related to the assessment of curriculum; (4) female principals desired a greater involvement than males; and (5) there was lack of consistency by grade level as to the degree of involvement desired by principals and teachers. Over all educational areas, however, both teachers and principals desired greater involvement of parents, students, and community members than they now perceive as occurring. Contains 16 references. (RAH)

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TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS VIEW SHARED DECISION MAKING: SHOULD PARENTS, COMMUNITY AND STUDENTS BE INVOLVED?

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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to assess how teachers and principals in Maine schools perceive the current and ideal involvement of students, parents and community members in educational decisions. In general, teachers and administrators desire greater involvement of students, parents and community members. However, they, the teachers and administrators, do not agree about the desired level of involvement by decision area.

THE STATUS OF SHARED DECISION MAKING IN RURAL SCHOOLS OF MAINE

The research on school change and restructuring has grown at a near geometric rate since the mid-70's. Part of that research has focused on the school principal. In studying the specific role of the principal in change, those judged to be effective were found to share power and responsibility with others (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1990) and to work collaboratively with others (Rosenholtz, 1989). These cited effective traits of principals describe shared decision making which has become a major focus of many school restructuring endeavors (National Governors Association, 1989; Buckley and Westerberg, 1990; Combs, 1989; Lieberman, 1989; Kessler, 1992). Most of the recent restructuring literature favors shared decision making by the principal involving teachers and in some cases students, parents and other community members. Some of the benefits ascribed to it are: facilitators making better decisions; encourages teachers to assume greater responsibility for what happens in the school (Keith and Girling, 1991); increases teacher job satisfaction (Flannery, 1980); minimizes sabotage of selected decisions (Keith and Girling, 1991); increases efficacy of those involved (March and Simon, 1985); and contributes to improved student achievement (Dismuke, 1993).

Decision making encompasses the steps taken in selecting among alternatives or choosing alternative courses of action. It requires assigning priorities and making choices (Keith and Girling, 1991). Sharing this somewhat messy process can be beneficial.

> However, confusion can be a very real hazard in organizational decision making. Unless participants know just what procedures the organization is using to arrive at decisions and what their own role and function will be in the procedures, the very advantages ascribed to "democratic" or participatory decision making may well be nullified (Owen, 1991, p. 283).

Are principals and teachers willing to engage in the process and involve parents, community and students in order to reach the common goal of shared decision making? The understood common goal of shared decision making is to make schools responsive to the needs of students by creating systems where teachers, parents, community members and students participate more fully in educational decision making.

Flannery (1980) found that teachers with the highest level of expertise were particularly interested in participating in school level decision making. Perry, Brown and McIntire (1994) in a study of rural teachers found that all teachers wished for more involvement in decision making than they presently had.

There is little evidence to suggest that parent involvement in school governance decision affects student learning in the school (Fullan, 1991). However, when parents were actively involved rather than allowed token participation only, benefits were reported by both parents and school district staff (Melaragno, Lyons, and Sparks, 1981). Community involvement at the high school level was one factor that characterized effective schools (Wilson and Corcoran, 1988). Student involvement in restructuring is seen as a positive and necessary component to successful change. Fullan (1991) notes that " . . . it is going to be the accumulation of a multitude of small ways that counts for the individual student, not the participation of a few student leaders" (p. 190).

If effective principals involve teachers and the community in shared decision making for restructuring efforts, if teachers favor such a practice, and if involvement of parents, community and students appears to be a positive contribution to the change process, why is it that few schools provide for more than token participation from these groups (Fullan, 1991)? Do principals and teachers really desire involvement of others in school decisions? The 1990 NEA Site-Based Decision Making Census found that almost all projects involved administrators and teachers, that support personnel and parents were not well represented, and the group most poorly represented was students ((NEA, 1991). This study was designed to assess teachers' and principals' perception of current and desired involvement of parents, community members and students in school decision making.

METHODS

One hundred and fifty two teachers from fifteen Maine schools involved in school restructuring efforts and two hundred and twenty three principals responding to a state-wide marked survey reported their perceptions of the present degree of involvement of six constituent groups—(1) school board members, (2) superintendent office staffs, (3) principals, (4) teachers, (5) students, and (6) parents and community members - in decision making. At the same time they responded to how ideally they would like to see decision making and what the roles of the six groups in their systems should be. The results presented here address only the present and ideal involvement for students, parents and community members as seen by teachers and principals. The teachers and principals surveyed were primarily from rural areas.

The survey was designed to assess decision making in four basic areas: (1) mission, goals and objectives as they relate to the district, buildings and classrooms; (2) curriculum, from specific learning outcomes to the development of curriculum documents; (3) communication and how it relates to procedures to adequately involve staff, students and community in school issues; and (4) students, which includes methods of assessing student progress and program of study requirements. The choices of involvement ranged along a 5-point continuum from "primarily responsible for the decision" to "not involved or informed during the decision making process". The four topic areas were chosen as ones parents, community and students might have a vested interest in. For these types of decisions, we know that teachers desire a high degree of involvement (Conway, 1984; Perry; Brown, McIntire, 1994). Teachers completed the survey in their schools during the 1992-1993 school year. All Maine principals (N=712) were surveyed by mail during Spring 1993 (31% response rate).

Reliability of the instrument

Item-total statistics and alpha coefficients were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the Decision-Making Questionnaire scales (i.e., mission-current and -ideal; curriculum-current and -ideal; communication-current and ideal; and student-current and -ideal). Initially, this set of analyses were conducted separately for teachers and principals, but were later combined due to the similar pattern of results. Item-total statistics were first computed to examine the relationship between each item and its scale. The results did not identify any items that should be deleted for scale integrity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were then calculated to determine the internal consistency for each of the scales. Results indicated all scales had good internal consistency, and that the ideal scales had slightly higher values than the current scales. Alpha levels ranged from .69 to .77 for the current scales and from .78 to .79 for the ideal scales.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha values for the eight subscales of the Decision-Making Questionnaire.

	Current	Ideal
Mission	.72	.78
Curriculum	.69	.79
Communication	.77	.78
Students	.69	.79

RESULTS

To be considered as supporting "involvement", either currently or ideally, respondents must have answered a (4) or (5) on a scale of (1) "not involved or informed during the decision making process"; to (3) "opinions sought but not necessarily involved" to (5) "fully involved in decision (2)".

In all educational areas, both teachers and principals desire greater involvement of both parents, community members and students in decision making than they now perceive as occurring. Principals perceive greater current involvement of both groups than do teachers. Also, female principals desire greater involvement than male principals in the (ideal) extent of parent, community members and students participation in all decision making areas.

Involvement with Decisions Related to District Mission

District Mission (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**17**	**70**	**53**
Males	14	63	49
Female	19	82	63
Teachers (Total)	**12**	**56**	**44**
Male	15	55	44
Female	11	57	46
Principals (K-5, K-8	15	70	55
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	14	65	51
Principals (6-8)	13	75	62
Teachers (6-8)	8	45	37
Principals (9-12)	21	68	47
Teachers (9-12)	10	54	44

District Mission (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**31**	**78**	**47**
Males	31	78	47
Female	27	93	66
Teachers (Total)	**19**	**65**	**46**
Male	17	67	50
Female	22	68	46
Principals (K-5,K-8)	29	86	57
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	32	70	38
Principals (6-8)	44	91	47
Teachers (6-8)	11	61	50
Principals (9-12)	29	74	45
Teachers (9-12)	7	70	63

Presently neither teachers nor principals perceive any real involvement of parents and community members in decisions related to district mission (teachers 19%, principals - 31%). In the ideal, 65% of teachers and 78% of principals would involve parents and community members in such decisions. Female principals (92%) desire more involvement than males, (78%).

Similar perceptions are held by teachers and principals for student involvement in decisions related to district mission. Presently only 12% of teachers and 17% of principals perceive any student involvement. Again female principals 19% perceive greater involvement presently than male principals 14%. In the ideal 56% of teachers and 70% of the principals desire. involvement of students. Almost 20% more female principals (92%) desire student involvement in the ideal than males (63%).

Both groups, teachers and principals, desire that parents and community members be involved, but when it comes to students, the teachers are not as supportive as principals for their involvement.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Building Level Goals

Building Level Goals (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**31**	**78**	**47**
Male	16	61	45
Female	22	83	61
Teachers (Total)	**11**	**52**	**41**
Male	11	53	42
Female	11	53	42
Principals (K-5,K-8)	12	68	56
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	13	56	43
Principals (6-8)	25	78	53
Teachers (6-8)	6	43	37
Principals (9-12)	26	68	42
Teachers (9-12)	12	56	44

Building Level Goals/Parents	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**31**	**78**	**47**
Male	29	69	40
Female	33	90	57
Teachers (Total)	**18**	**58**	**40**
Male	20	61	41
Female	19	56	37
Principals (K-5,K-8)	33	81	48
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	29	60	31
Principals (6-8)	32	79	47
Teachers (6-8)	11	55	44
Principals (9-12)	27	67	40
Teachers (9-12)	10	56	46

With regard to decisions related to building level goals and objectives, once again principals perceive that parents and community members are involved to a greater degree presently (31%) than teachers (18%). In the ideal, 58% of the teachers and 78% of the principals would like parent and community input. Female principals desire greater involvement than the males, 90% to 69%.

There are similar perceptions of student involvement. Teachers perceive little present involvement 11%, while 31% of principals perceive that students are now involved. In the ideal, teachers want more student involvement, but just over 52%, as compared to principals at 78%. There is a significant gap between teachers and principals, with 25% more principals desiring student involvement. This is primarily attributable to female principals, 82% of whom would involve students, compared to 61% of male principals.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Curriculum Content

Curriculum content (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**12**	**56**	**44**
Male	9	53	44
Female	12	61	49
Teachers (Total)	**8**	**46**	**38**
Male	6	42	36
Female	9	47	38
Principals (K-5,K-8)	7	53	46
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	13	54	41
Principals (6-8)	13	56	43
Teachers (6-8)	3	37	34
Principals (9-12)	15	62	47
Teachers (9-12)	3	38	35

Curriculum Content (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**19**	**64**	**45**
Male	15	60	45
Female	20	67	47
Teachers (Total)	**11**	**44**	**33**
Male	11	53	42
Female	12	40	28
Principals (K-5,K-8)	19	70	51
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	18	54	36
Principals (6-8)	16	60	44
Teachers (6-8)	3	37	34
Principals (9-12)	18	55	37
Teachers (9-12)	8	35	27

The teachers perceive little involvement of students (8%)and parents and community (11%) with decisions related to establishing the content of the curriculum. Twelve percent (12%) of principals believe that students are presently involved and 19% that parents and community members are involved. In the ideal, 64% of principals would involve parents and community members in such decisions, but only 56% of the principals would involve students. On the other hand the majority of teachers do not desire either parents and community members or students involved in such decisions. Only 44% of the teachers desired involvement of parents and community with 46% supportive of student involvement in decisions related to curriculum content.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Assessment of Curriculum

Curriculum Assessment (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**9**	**42**	**33**
Male	4	36	32
Female	15	54	39
Teachers (Totals)	**4**	**43**	**39**
Male	6	43	37
Female	3	44	41
Principals (K-5,K-8)	6	44	38
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	7	52	45
Principals (6-8)	10	38	28
Teachers (6-8)	0	37	37
Principals (9-12)	11	48	37
Teachers (9-12)	3	36	33

Curriculum Assessment (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**8**	**48**	**40**
Male	8	44	36
Female	11	54	43
Teachers (Total)	**7**	**38**	**31**
Male	3	46	43
Female	10	36	26
Principals (K-5,K-8)	8	57	49
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	11	40	29
Principals (6-8)	10	38	28
Teachers (6-8)	8	37	29
Principals (9-12)	11	38	27
Teachers (9-12)	0	36	36

Teachers do not presently perceive that students (4%) or parents and community members (7%) are involved with decisions related to assessment of the curriculum. In the ideal they desire greater involvement. 43% of the teachers desired involvement of students, and 38% would involve parents and community members. The principals perceptions support the teachers with 9% of the principals perceiving that students are presently involved and 8% that parents and community members are involved. In the ideal, 42% of the principals would involve students and 48% would involve parents and community members. As before, female principals desire a significantly higher involvement than to males.

Involvement with Decisions Related to External Communication with Community

Communication External (Students)	**NOW %**	**IDEAL %**	**DIFFERENCE %**
Principals (Total)	**12**	**67**	**55**
Male	12	63	51
Female	14	75	61
Teachers (Total)	**9**	**65**	**56**
Male	8	54	46
Female	12	72	60
Principals (K-5,K-8)	12	68	56
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	14	72	58
Principals (6-8)	10	53	43
Teachers (6-8)	8	68	60
Principals (9-12)	17	73	56
Teachers (9-12)	7	55	48

Communication External (Parents)	**NOW**	**IDEAL**	**DIFFERENCE**
Principals (Total)	**39**	**87**	**48**
Male	36	83	47
Female	41	87	36
Teachers (Total)	**28**	**80**	**52**
Male	22	77	55
Female	33	85	52
Principals (K-5,K-8)	48	91	43
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	39	87	48
Principals (6-8)	35	85	50
Teachers (6-8)	21	84	63
Principals (9-12)	23	75	52
Teachers	21	72	51

Decisions related to how the school communicates with the external community were viewed similarly by both teachers and principals. Both perceive little present involvement by students or parents and community members. Nine percent (9%) of the teachers and 12% of the principals perceive students involvement, 28% of the teachers 39% of the principals perceive that parents and community members are involved presently. In the ideal, 65% of the teachers and 67% of the principals would involve students. Also, 80% of the teachers and 87% of principals would involve parents and community members with decisions related to external communication. Both teachers and principals would welcome greater input from parents and community members for these type of decisions.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Internal Communication

Communication Internal (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**28**	**86**	**58**
Male	21	80	59
Female	30	89	59
Teachers (Total)	**18**	**69**	**51**
Male	17	67	50
Female	20	71	51
Principals (K-5,K-8)	20	84	64
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	23	74	51
Principals (6-8)	33	84	51
Teachers (6-8)	11	71	60
Principals (9-12)	29	84	55
Teachers (9-12)	19	66	47

Communications Internal (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**23**	**69**	**46**
Male	16	62	46
Female	28	81	53
Teachers (Total)	**17**	**61**	**44**
Male	20	63	43
Female	19	63	44
Principals (K-5,K-8)	25	75	50
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	27	68	41
Principals (6-8)	22	71	49
Teachers (6-8)	8	63	55
Principals (9-12)	15	56	41
Teachers (9-12)	12	53	41

The teachers were very consistent with their perceptions of the present involvement of students (18%) and parent and community members (17%) with decisions related to internal communication. In the ideal, 69% of the teachers would involve students and 61% would involve parents. The principals perceive a greater present involvement of students (28%) and ideally 86% of the principals would involve students with such decisions. Female principals believe that parent and community members are presently more involved (28%) than males (16%). In the ideal 81% of the female principals would involve parents and community members as compared to 61% of the males.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Student's Program of Study

Student's Program of Study (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**12**	**65**	**53**
Male	10	60	50
Female	11	74	63
Teachers (Total)	**8**	**53**	**45**
Male	8	45	37
Female	7	57	50
Principals (K-5,K-8)	6	66	60
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	9	62	53
Principals (6-8)	10	60	50
Teachers (6-8)	6	46	40
Principals (9-12)	19	73	54
Teachers (9-12)	8	48	40

Student's Program of Study (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**16**	**73**	**57**
Male	13	68	55
Female	18	84	66
Teachers (Total)	**12**	**53**	**41**
Male	7	45	38
Female	14	55	41
Principals (K-5,K-8)	17	79	62
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	19	63	44
Principals (6-8)	19	78	59
Teachers (6-8)	9	49	40
Principals (9-12)	11	67	56
Teachers (9-12)	8	45	37

With regard to decisions of student's program of study, 8% of the teachers believe that students are presently involved and 12% believe that parent and community members are involved. In the ideal, 53% of the teachers believe that students, parents and community members should take an active part and 65% of principals desire greater involvement.

Involvement with Decisions Related to Assessment of Student Progress

Students Assessment (Students)	NOW %	IDEAL %	DIFFERENCE %
Principals (Total)	**9**	**62**	**53**
Male	6	59	53
Female	10	71	61
Teachers (Total)	**8**	**51**	**43**
Male	6	39	33
Female	10	58	48
Principals (K-5,K-8)	4	61	57
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	11	63	52
Principals (6-8)	7	57	50
Teachers (6-8)	0	49	49
Principals (9-12)	13	73	60
Teachers (9-12)	10	38	28

Student Assessment (Parents)	NOW	IDEAL	DIFFERENCE
Principals (Total)	**14**	**58**	**44**
Male	13	53	40
Female	14	67	53
Teachers (Total)	**8**	**39**	**31**
Male	6	33	27
Female	10	41	31
Principals (k-5,K-8)	14	64	50
Teachers (K-5,K-8)	10	49	39
Principals (6-8)	22	53	31
Teachers (6-8)	6	34	28
Principals (9-12)	11	51	40
Teachers (9-12)	7	28	21

Only 8% of the teachers perceive that students, parents and community members are presently involved in decisions related to students assessment. In the ideal, 51% of the teachers would involve students, but only 39% would involve parents. This is not a topic with which teachers want parents involved. In the ideal, 62% of the principals would involve students, with 58% of the principals ideally involving parents and community members, again there is a difference between female (67%) and male (53%) principals.

Summary:

* Teachers and Principals perceive little current involvement and desire greater involvement in all decision-making areas

* Principals would involve students, parents and community members with decisions related to curriculum content, however, less than 50% of the teachers would agree with this.

* Neither Principals nor teachers really desire involvement of students, parents and community members with decisions related to the assessment of the curriculum

* Female principals desire a greater involvement when compared to male principals

* There was not consistency by grade level as to the degree of involvement desired by principals and teachers.

For purposed of analysis, if one sets 10% discrepancy as a standard, then one observes that for 9 of the 16 decisions male and female teachers are in agreement as to the degree of involvement of students, parents, and community members in the ideal.

For the seven decisions where the degree of involvement is greater than 10% male teachers more often support greater involvement of parents in decisions that relate to curriculum content, and curriculum assessment. Female teachers support greater involvement for both parents and students with external communications and students program of study. They also support more student involvement in decision related to student assessment.

Principals in 12 of the 16 decisions had a discrepancy between males and females of 10% or greater. For all 12 decisions female principals desire greater involvement of students and or parents and community, than the males. The 4 decisions for which there was agreement were students and parent involvement with curriculum content; parents with external communication; and students with decisions related to internal communication.

When we look at the K-5 or K-8 schools the discrepancy between teachers and principals was 10% or greater in 9 of the 16 decisions. In 6-8 schools, 12 decisions were 10% or greater; and in 9-12 schools 12 decision differed by 10% or more.

The only decisions where teachers and principals agreed across all three school groups was the involvement of parents in decisions related to internal and external communication.

For Grades 9-12 there were no decisions where teachers and principals agreed on student involvement within the 10% discrepancy. The principals always desired greater involvement of students. The greatest discrepancy being 73% of the principals and only 38% of the teachers would involve students in decisions related to student assessment.

The issue is complex. The results are important for policy makers and educational leaders as new processes and structures are created to initiate school improvement or restructuring activities. There is a need for teachers and administrator to remain open to each other's perceptions, to take the time to understand each other's values and beliefs and to build the relationships necessary for changes to take place in schools.

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